

# AVIAN INFLUENZA

## What Hunters Should Know

Summer 2006



Michigan Department  
of Natural Resources

### Quick Facts about Asian H5N1 Avian Influenza

- Avian influenza (AI) is an infectious disease of birds caused by Type A influenza viruses. Water birds (waterfowl and shorebirds) are considered the natural reservoir of all AI viruses.
- AI is common in water bird populations, but usually affects small numbers of these birds and rarely causes obvious clinical signs of infection.
- In birds, the virus is largely spread through nasal and oral discharges, and fecal droppings.
- Few bird viruses are able to infect humans, but influenza viruses are able to mutate over time.
- AI viruses that cause mild signs in domestic poultry including respiratory disease are a form of AI called "Low Pathogenic."
- In 1997, in Hong Kong, an Asian variety of the high pathogenic form of H5N1 virus was identified and was, in rare cases, able to spread directly from domestic birds to humans.
- This particular virus is considered a Highly Pathogenic form of Avian Influenza because it is highly contagious and deadly to domestic poultry.
- Beginning in 2003, the strain of Asian H5N1 became much more harmful to birds and spread across Southeast Asia infecting millions of domestic poultry.
- To date, more than 200 people who have had close contact with the sick and/or dead birds have become ill and approximately half of those people have died. Only a few documented cases are from wild birds.
- Although large numbers of poultry were destroyed to stop the virus, it spread throughout Asia reaching Siberia and Kazakhstan. The virus has now been documented in birds in Europe and in humans and birds on the African continent.
- At this time, it is unclear what role wild birds play in the spread of this highly pathogenic avian influenza.
- Asian H5N1 has not been found in North America. In North America, there are no reports of positive tests in wild or domestic birds, and no known cases in humans.
- Asian H5N1 does not move easily to humans, and there are only a few documented cases of human infection from wild birds.
- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is doing avian influenza surveillance on ducks and geese during trapping and banding operations, and at waterfowl check stations.

#### HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM ASIAN H5N1 AVIAN INFLUENZA?

As a precaution, the U.S. Department of Interior's National Wildlife Health Center has issued the following guidelines for handling wild birds:

- Do not handle birds that are obviously sick or birds found dead.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling or cleaning your birds.
- Use rubber gloves when cleaning your birds.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes after dressing birds.
- Clean all tools and surfaces immediately afterward; use hot soapy water, then disinfect with a 10% chlorine bleach solution.
- Cook all meat thoroughly to an internal temperature of 165° F to kill the virus.

***Q: Can humans catch Asian H5N1 from wild birds?***

**A:** There are only a few documented cases of humans getting Asian H5N1 from wild birds. Normally, AI viruses are passed between various species of wild birds, but some AI viruses are highly pathogenic to domestic poultry. The human cases of Asian H5N1 have most often occurred in people that have had close contact with infected poultry and poultry products.

***Q: How could Asian H5N1 enter North America?***

**A:** Asian H5N1 is most likely to enter through the movement of infected poultry or illegally imported birds or bird products. Migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds, cross the Bering Sea between Siberia and Alaska during their seasonal cycles of breeding and wintering. While in Asia, migratory birds from North America could come into contact with infected domestic or wild birds and transport the virus back to Alaska. These birds could commingle with birds that move throughout North

America during migration.

***Q: Should bird hunters be concerned about Asian H5N1?***

**A:** Hunters should not be overly concerned at the present time, but should take some common sense precautions about hygiene while hunting (outlined on page 1). There are only a few documented cases of humans contracting Asian H5N1 infection from wild birds, and it is not clear whether Asian H5N1 is persistent in wild bird populations. More research and surveillance is needed. Michigan is participating in this effort.

***Q: Can my retriever catch Asian H5N1 from wild birds?***

**A:** So far there is no evidence that retrievers in normal hunting situations would be at any great risk. Nevertheless, prudent retriever owners should prevent their dogs from having contact with birds that are obviously sick or found dead in the field. Hunters should not feed their dogs any raw waterfowl parts. These are routine safety precautions that retriever owners should already be doing.

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## For More Information about Avian Influenza

See the DNR Web site at [www.michigan.gov/avianinfluenza](http://www.michigan.gov/avianinfluenza)

**Human Health Concerns**

Michigan Department of Community Health  
Division of Communicable Diseases  
P.O. Box 30195  
Lansing, MI 48909  
517-335-8165  
Or contact your local county health  
department or visit [www.michigan.gov/flu](http://www.michigan.gov/flu)

**For Additional Human Health Information:**

National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>

**World Health Organizations:**

[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/index.html)

**Wildlife Concerns**

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife Disease Laboratory  
4125 Beaumont Road, Room 250  
Lansing, MI 48910-8106  
517-336-5030  
[www.michigan.gov/avianinfluenza](http://www.michigan.gov/avianinfluenza)

*Please report die-offs of six or more water birds by calling the DNR Wildlife Disease Laboratory between the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays or after hours call (800) 292-7800 or use the bird reporting form found at the Web site address above.*

**Other documents/information available on the DNR Web site:**

- Avian influenza: preparation and response
- CDC information on AI
- DNR AI surveillance and response plan
- MDA AI response plan